CHAPTER-II

Socio-Economic Profile of the study area i.e -Goalpara District:

This chapter intends to the socio economic and demographic profile of the Goalpara district, the area of the study. Goalpara district is situated on the South Bank of the river Brahmaputra. Geographical location of the district is between latitude 25°50w-26° 10 and longitude 90°07-91o 05 E at 100-500 m above the mean sea level. It covers an area of 1831 sq km.

The word Goalpara is derived from Gwalitippika meaning Guwali Gaon (village of milk men) in Assamese. Another view in this regard is that after defeating Bana in war, Lord Krishna took rest in Sri Surjya Hill. Krishna himself was a son of a Guwala (milkman) and their colony was known as para. As Krishna took rest in this region, its name became known as Goalpara. Historian Edward Gait said that Goalpara was the capital of the kingdom of Kumar Bhaskar Varman. Goalpara was under the rule of Koch Kingdom. In 1826 British annexed Assam and Goalpara was made a part of Assam in 1874.

Historical Background of Goalpara District:

From historical sources it is found that in the later part of 17th century Goalpara was occupied by the Mughals, who introduced their administrative rules and regulations including the zamindari system. This zamindari system had a great impact on the social and economic life of the people of the region, and it
moulded the cultural life of the region, till its abolition in 1957. During the
British rule, Goalpara experienced several changes. After the Yandaboo Act of
1826, Goalpara was brought within the Assam Valley Division. But in 1827, it
was transferred to the Cooch Behar Commissionership. Again in 1874 Goalpara
came under the Judicial Commissioner of Assam. It became a part of the
province of ‘Eastern Bengal and Assam’ in 1905 and was transferred back to
Assam in 1912 (Datta, 1994:p, 9).

At the time of India’s independence, the district of Goalpara in the
westernmost part of Assam was bounded on the north by the mountainous
country of Bhutan, on the east by the undivided district of Kamrup, on the south
by the Garo Hills districts of Meghalaya and on the west by the districts of Cooch
Behar and Jalpaiguri in West Bengal and Rangpur in Bangladesh (Dutta 1994:p, 1).
In 1957 it was made up of three sub-divisions - Dhubri, Goalpara and
Kokrajhar. But in 1983 it was split up three and each subdivision was made into a
separate district.

The people:

B.C Allen had observed in 1905 “the homogeneity is the dominant note
in the social system of Goalpara and a single caste, Rajbongshi forms over one
fourth of the total population. More than one fourth of the total population are
Mohammadans and less than a quarter of the whole is thus left for all castes and
tribes outside the Rajbonshi group. The higher castes, such as the Brahmans and
Kaysthas are by no means strongly represented. Even the Kalitas who stand for middle class respectability in Assam and form so large proportion of the population of Kamrup are comparatively few in numbers. The same may be said of the Kewats or Kaibartas who rank next after the Kalitas in the estimation of the Assamese”. (Allen: 1905).

The observation of B.C Allen is correct. But in recent times, the heavy influx of people from the west, mostly from Eastern Bengal has brought a great change in the population of the district.

The Bodos are another major dominant group of Assam. In the next, they are called Mech and in the South they are called Kacharis. These Bodo peoples are spread over all parts of the district. Their biggest concentration is found in Kokrajhar, Udalguri, Baksa, and Darrangiri, Dudhnoi, Balbala, Ranjuli, Amjonga areas.

The Rabhas are another major dominating group in the region. They are living in the plain areas. They have adopted religion and social beliefs of the local Hindus. The Rabhas are dominant in Makri, Bhalukdubi, Rangjuli, Darrangiri, Dhupdha, Boko areas of Goalpararegion. Their heaviest concentration is found in the South bank of the Brahmaputra River. The Garos is another group living in the Southern parts of the region. Now their heaviest concentration is found in the Garo hills district. Though the Hojong is a small tribe group, their
importance cannot be ignored. Their number is greater in Garo hill district than in Goalpara. But they have adopted the culture of the Goalpara region.

The Rajbongshis are another major group of Goalpara region. There seems to be no doubt that the Koch and Rajbongshi of Assam are one and the same district” (Allen: 1905). The heaviest concentration of Rajbongshis are found in Goalpara, Jalpaiguri and Kochbehar areas.

Kalitas are another major caste group in Goalpara region. The word “kalita” was applied to all Aryans who were not Brahmans. These kalitas were very powerful. They have enjoyed considerable power and prestige in the region.

The Brahmins are also major caste group in the region. Both the Bengali Brahmins and Assamese Brahmins are found in the region. The Bengali Brahmins have taken the title like Bhattacharya, Chakravorty, Choudhury. Most of the Brahmins have taken the business of zajmany. Along with the Brahmins and Kalitas, Kayasthas are also prominent in the region. Among them there are Bhuyans. The Nath community people called Jugis another prominent caste group in the region. They have spread over all parts of the region. This community has enjoyed and occupied a very important place in the region. They are mostly concentrated in the Jogighopa area of the region. But the Jugis are considered as lower caste people in the region. Their traditional occupation is weaving.

Other communities like Nadiyals, Doms or Namashudras, Bhuimalis (drummers), Hirars and Kumars (potters), Phulmalis (artificial flower--
makers) *Napits* (barbars) are concentrated in the region. They are regarded as inferior castes in the region.

The local Muslim is another important group of the region. During the time of Mughals, many Muslims had concentrated in the region permanently. They had married local Muslim girls. They had adopted Assamese culture, language and way of life. The local Muslims are called *Deshi*. The illegal immigration of Bengali speaking Muslim peasants from Bangladesh into Assam have changed the demographic profiles of Goalpara district. These Bengali Muslim immigrants have encroached upon and occupied a large portion of land belonging to the local people. Actually the migration of Bengali speaking Muslim peasants from East Bengal began in 1800 after the British annexed Assam in 1826 with the Treaty of Yandaboo. Continuous efforts are done by these people to assimilate into the culture and soil of the Goalpara district. By the second decade of the 20th century this influx became a cause for alarm. Vast tracts of land in Goalpara were occupied by Bengali Muslim peasants in the decades before partition and after independence. These immigrants settled on west lands and the shiftingsandbarsof Brahmaputra and its tributaries called *chars* or *chaporis*. These Bengali Muslim people migrate to the towns as construction labourers, vegetables vendors, rickshaw pullers, auto drivers, tempo drivers. These Bengali speaking people come from the East Bengal are called *Bhatiyas*. Their main occupation is agriculture.

**Table 2.1:**
Sex Ratio by Religion for Rural and Total Population in Goalpara District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Religion</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>956</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Religion</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindus</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindus</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christians</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christians</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>990</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census India 2001

Principal Crops:

The principal crops of the district are paddy, ragi, groundnut, sugarcane, chilly, areca nuts, betal leaves, banana, jute. Usually paddy is sown on rain fed lands and transplanted on irrigated and rain fed medium and lowlands. Sugarcane is grown. Groundnut is grown both during kharif and Rabi seasons. The area under paddy cultivation is the largest among all the crops which the district produces.

Occupation:
Agriculture is the main occupation of majority of people of Goalpara district. Majority of rites and ceremonies are directly related with agriculture. The dependence on agriculture of the people is immense. Rice is the main food of the people. Rice cultivation occupies an important place in the life of the people. The other important food crops are millet, pulses, mustard, wheat, sugarcane, jute, tobacco. Economy of the region is simple. It is agriculture related. There is practically no organised industry. There are informal workers engaged in occupations like fishing, pottery making, ornament making, working on pith, weaving, basket making etc. But unfortunately these workers are not economically self-sufficient. So, such people have always turned to agriculture as a subsidiary means of livelihood. The majority of people engaged in agriculture either as cultivators or labourers are poor.

Fishing is another source of income for the rural people. Fishermen belong to the castes of Jhalo, Dom, Nadiyal Hira, Majhi, Malla, amongst the Hindus and Datiya among the Muslims. But all sections of people take delight in catching the fishes for home consumption. Fishing is a favourite hobby of majority of people. Through fishing many people earn money and it is their source of income.

The economy of Goalpara district is simple and this is economically backward. There is no any organised industry in the district. The district is primarily agrarian as 90 percent of the total population depend on agriculture for their livelihood. The district is known for its production of areca nuts and banana.
Poverty and poor economic position are reflected in the well-known Goalpariya folk songs. Zamindary system is one of the main reasons responsible for this poverty. Under this system, landlords and their big agents owned almost the entire cultivable land. So, many of the villagers had lost their land. Due to lack of land they could not plough. As a result majority of the cultivators had simply worked as rayots. Here the lion’s share had gone to the land lords. The cultivators enjoyed a little. This is the main factor behind the absence of prosperous and rich farmers in this region.

Another occupation like rickshaw, thelapulling, driving of car, bus, truck, auto are some of the important occupations for some people. Rickshaw and thelapullers are basically Muslim people. Of course some Hindi speaking people, Bengali people are also engaged in this business. The Bengali speaking Mulims who are known as Bhatiya in the district are living in the river side of the Brahmaputra. Most of them do the work of cultivation and export their crops and other vegetables to other parts of the district.

The position of Goalpara in case of industry is insignificant. We can say that the district is industrially backward. The district has eight registered factories and about 1500 small scale units. The district has four handloom training centres, four weavers’ extension services units and one handloom production centre.
Handicraft provides additional income to the people. So, it helps in increasing the level of economic status of the people. Along with the agricultural work, people are engaged in the handicraft works. Most of the products of handicrafts are sold at local as well as at outside markets. But insufficiency of raw materials creates many problems for the artisans.

The work participation ratio for rural Goalpara is 53.68 percent. For male the ratio is high as 91.91 percent which is possible in a predominantly agrarian society. The female work participation ratio is found as only 14.52 percent. A large number of female work forces are engaged in agriculture.

A large number of women in Goalpara region are engaged in weaving.

**The administration:**

The district headquarter is located at Goalpara. There is one municipality. The Session Court and District Court is situated at the heart of the town. Goalpara occupies an area of 1911 square kilometres. In 2006 Indian Government named Goalpara one of the country’s 250 most backward districts out of a total of 640. There are four Assam Legislative Assembly Constituencies in the district namely Dudhnoi, Goalpara East, Goalpara West and Jaleswar. Dudhnoi is in the Guwahati Lok Sabha Constituency, whilst the other three are in the Dhubri Lok Sabha Constituency. As per 2001 Census, the total population of Goalpara district is 8, 22,305 with a decadal growth of 23.03 percent during 1991-2001, which is higher than the state and national average. Only about 8.1
percent population in the district lives in the urban areas, which is lower than the state average of 12.9 percent. The density of population in the district is 451 per sq km which is higher than the state average of 340 persq km. According to the 2011 census, Goalpara district has a population of 10,08,959 of which 5,14,162 are males and 4,94,797 are females. The population of the Muslim is 441,516 (53.71%), Hindus are 314,157 and Christians are 64,662. The district has a population density of 553 inhabitants per square kilometre. Its population growth rate over the decade 2001-2011 was 22.74%. Goalpara has sex ratio of 962 females for every 1000 males and a literacy rate of 66.67%. Unbalanced sex ratio is neither socially nor economically desirable. The decline in the female population comparison to males may be due to the negligence to the female child.

The present Goalpara district was created in the year 1983 with two subdivisions viz Goalpara Sadar Sub Division and North Salmara Civil Sub Division. The district covers an area of 1842 sq. km and is bounded by the West and East Garo Hills of the state of Meghalaya on the South and Kamrup district on the East, Dhubri district on the West and the mighty river Brahmaputra all along the North. This is the present geographical boundary of Goalpara district. There are two tea gardens in the district. These are namely Maijunga tea estates and Simlitola tea estate.

The district has 945 primary schools, 276 middle schools, 152 high schools, 13 higher secondary schools. Goalpara College is situated at the heart of the town. There is only one Law College at the Bhalukdubi area of the district.
Total area of Assam is 78,438 sq.km. Density of Assam is 397 per sq.km. 

Assam’s literacy rate of 73.18/ was lower than all India literacy rate 74.04/. The all India literacy rate for male was 82.14/ against which it was 78.81/. (Census Report 2011).

**Table 2.2**

**PWD Roads in Goalpara District**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District/ State</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Surfaced</th>
<th>Unsurfaced</th>
<th>State Highways</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Urban</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goalpara</td>
<td>909</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>721</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>791</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>43761</td>
<td>8424</td>
<td>26337</td>
<td>2820</td>
<td>3839</td>
<td>26907</td>
<td>1194</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source: Statistical Handbook Assam 2006**

The district at present has 861 revenue villages - 5 Revenue Circles (a) Lakhipur, (b) Balijana, (c) Maitya, (d) Dudhnoi, (e) Rangejuli. There are 8 Rural Development Blocks------------------

(a) Rangejuli, (b) Matiya, (c) Mornoi, (d) Agia, (e) Lakhipur

There are 6 State Dispensaries - (a) Bahati, (b) Choibari, (c) Kharmuja, (d) Dolgoma, (e) Khutabari, (f) Tiplai.

There are 5 sub dispensaries - a) Dhumerghat, (b) Chunari, (c) Ambari Bazar, (d) Baguan, (e) Harimura.
There are 15 Veterinary State Dispensaries—
(a) Goalpara,
(b) Matiya,
(c) Kothakuthi,
(d) Kahibari,
(e) Ranjuli,
(f) Krishnai,
(g) Sesapani,
(h) Dudhnoi,
(i) Maida,
(j) Badhapur,
(k) Balijana,
(l) Joyramkuchi,
(m) Anbari Bazar,
(n) Lakhipur,
(o) Jaleswar.

The road network in the district is 749 km and it is well connected by roads and railways NH-37, NH-51, NH-62 and NF Railways. Every year the district experiences the floods. During the rainy season, floods occur specially in the month of July, August.

An Autonomous Council namely Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council was established to safeguard the interest and demands of the Rabha people. Its headquarter is situated at Dudhnoi area. Except some parts of Matiya, Balijana and Lakhipur, it covers almost all the areas of Goalparadistrict. 

(http://goalpara.gov.in/)

Human Development Index:
In respect of Human Development Index, Goalpara is one of the lowest ranked districts of Assam. The district ranks 18 in respect of HDI with an Index value of 0.308 which is below the state average of 0.407. In terms of income, education and health the district occupies 14th, 18th, and 16th place respectively. The Human Poverty Index calculated in 1999 indicates that 26.30 percent of the population in the district is in poverty. The Gender Related Development Index for Goalpara is estimated to be 0.413, which is less than the state average of 0.537. The GDI rank of Goalpara which stands at 12 is higher than the HDI rank at 18. The high GDI rank compared to HDI indicates low gender disparity in the district. (Assam Human Development Report, 2003)

### Table 2.3

**Classification of Working Population of the District**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workers</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% of the total population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main workers</td>
<td>1,78,306</td>
<td>31,622</td>
<td>2,09,928</td>
<td>25.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal workers</td>
<td>24,306</td>
<td>39,691</td>
<td>63,997</td>
<td>7.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2,02,612</td>
<td>71,313</td>
<td>2,73,925</td>
<td>33.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2, 17,639</td>
<td>3, 30,471</td>
<td>5,48,110</td>
<td>66.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non workers</td>
<td>78,082</td>
<td>23,025</td>
<td>11,107</td>
<td>12.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultivators</td>
<td>32,415</td>
<td>17,690</td>
<td>50,105</td>
<td>6.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural labourers</td>
<td>4,197</td>
<td>8,682</td>
<td>12,879</td>
<td>1.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household workers</td>
<td>87,918</td>
<td>21,916</td>
<td>10,9834</td>
<td>13.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other workers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source: 2001 Census of India**

**Literacy Rate:**

As per 2001 census, the literacy rate in the district (58.03%) is lower than that of the state average of 63.32%. Female literacy is lower than the male literacy rate both in rural and urban areas. However, the gender differential in literacy rate is higher in rural areas in the district.

Table 2.4
Zamindary system was prevalent in Goalpara region. A zamindar was an aristocrat, who occupied enormous tracts of land and applied his control over the peasants. A zamindar collected tax from the peasants. They were equivalent to the status of lords and barons. Zamindars exercised their full power over the general masses. This zamindary system was very much popular and prevalent in North of India. Feudalism was in operation during the reign of the zamindars. These landholders always exploited the landless peasants.

Along with tea, rubber cultivation is also playing a significant role in Goalpara’s economy. Large number of rubber teas is planted on Goalpara district. Goalparaisalso rich in bamboo basedindustries like papermanufacturing industry.

Total area of Goalpara district is 1,824 sq.km. The villages of Goalpara are Asudubi, Bhalukdubi, Damara Patpara, Gobndapur, Kharijapikon, Lakhipur, Nidanpur, Salpara, Thekhashu,Makri, Sholmari, Krishnai, Mornoi, Dudhnoi, Dhupdhara,Balijana, Rangjuli,Matiya, Agiya, Bakaitary. The district has a
population density of 553 inhabitants per square kilometre. Its population growth rate in 2001 to 2011 was 22.74%. Goalpara has a sex ratio of 962 females for every 1000 males and literacy rate of 68.67% (http://goalpara.gov.in/).

Data revealed by census of India 2011, the density of Goalpara district for 2011 is 553 people per square. In 2001, the density of Goalpara district was 453 people per square kilometre. The literacy rate of Goalpara district was 58.03%. In 2011, the literacy rate was 67.37%. Male literacy rate was 71.46% and female literacy was 63.13%. In 2001 census, male literacy was 64.86% and female literacy was 50.85% in Goalpara district.

Sex ratio in Goalpara is 964 per 1000 males. In 2001 it stood at 956. 2011 Census report reveals that 13.69% percent people live in the urban areas of Goalpara district. Sex ratio in Goalpara district is 971. The same 2011 census report reveals that 86.31% percent people are living in rural areas of Goalpara district. The sex ratio is 963 females per 1000 males in the rural areas. Population growth in Goalpara district 1, 008, 183, growth rate 22.64%, Sex ratio is 964, literacy rate is 67.37%

CHAPTER-III

Women Workers in Informal Sector: Beedi and Brick Industries: